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Andover Newton announces second fully endowed CIRCLE fellowship

NEWTON CENTRE, Mass. (Dec. 8, 2014) – Andover Newton Theological School, America’s first theological seminary and first graduate school of any kind, has secured funding to endow in perpetuity the second of 12 student fellowships, part of a bold new fundraising effort to fully endow the inter-religious fellowship program run in partnership with neighboring Hebrew College.

The grateful family of the late Rev. Edward R. Sherblom and Ruth E. Sherblom has donated \$40,000 to endow a fellowship in their names through the Center for Inter-Religious and Communal Leadership Education (CIRCLE), a joint center operated by Andover Newton and Hebrew College. The CIRCLE fellowship program brings together Christian, Jewish, and Unitarian Universalist seminarians with Muslim community fellows to work in pairs on inter-religious initiatives of their own design while participating as a cohort in a yearlong inter-religious leadership program.

The grandson of working-class Swedish immigrants, Edward Sherblom earned a BA from Bates and an MDiv from Andover Newton (1947) and served as a minister in American Baptist churches in Rhode Island for 45 years. Rae was raised in a middle-class family in Washington, D.C., and on meeting Ed as undergraduates at Bates, decided to abandon her middle-class existence, and her own career, to be Ed’s life partner in seeking to transform the world through love. Together, they started Founders Memorial Baptist Church in Portsmouth, R.I., near founder’s brook, where Roger Williams had baptized his first followers.

Ed’s ministry of God’s love transcended church doctrine, seen in many ways over his 45-year ministerial career, but perhaps never more strongly than in 1988, when he and his congregation welcomed their son David, a homosexual man dying of AIDS, home to die in the comfort of his family and faith. Rae went on to become a prominent speaker and surrogate mother to hundreds of gay men dying from AIDS who had been abandoned by their families of birth.

"My father was a man of his time, yet he reached beyond the prejudices of his time to embrace transracial, homosexual, and interfaith relationships as all being within the broad embrace of God's love," said their son the Rev. Dr. James P. "Jim" Sherblom, chair of Andover Newton’s Board of Trustees and senior minister at First Parish (Unitarian Universalist) in Brookline, Mass.

The Edward R. and Ruth E. Sherblom Fellowship Endowment seeks to enable students who wish to develop the skills for authentic, successful interfaith engagement as part of their

leadership training to become fellows in the CIRCLE program and offer similar moral courage in the face of society's prejudices.

"Ed worked mightily to reconcile the historic doctrines of the American Baptist Church with his understanding of God's love in the late 20th century congregations he served," Jim Sherblom said. "New times call for new skills, and CIRCLE helps prepare religious leaders for the emerging interfaith 21st-century congregations that these leaders will serve."

Funding from a Henry R. Luce Foundation grant currently supports 12 CIRCLE fellows each year. Endowing the student fellowships is an important step toward self-sufficiency, said CIRCLE co-founder and co-director Jennifer Howe Peace, assistant professor of interfaith studies at Andover Newton.

"Having seen the success and value of the fellowship program, we wanted to make it sustainable rather than dependent on grant funding," Peace said. The first fully endowed CIRCLE fellowship was announced in fall 2014 and bears the name of Peace's mother-in-law, late Andover Newton alumna Edie Howe.

Anyone interested in helping endow other CIRCLE fellowships may contact the following parties:

- Andover Newton Theological School: Jennifer Craig, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, jcraig@ants.edu.
- Hebrew College: Jan Moidel Schwartz, Senior Development Officer, (617) 559-8766, or email jschwartz@hebrewcollege.edu.
- Dr. Jennifer Howe Peace, CIRCLE co-director, (617) 831-2405, or email jpeace@ants.edu.
- Rabbi Or Rose, CIRCLE co-director, (617) 559-8636, or email orose@hebrewcollege.edu.
- Ms. Celene Ayat Lizzio, CIRCLE co-director, (617) 831-2440, or email clizzio@ants.edu.

The CIRCLE leadership hopes to raise funds from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Unitarian Universalist donors so the funding of the fellowships will reflect the diversity of the program, Peace said. And once the 12 fellowships are endowed, CIRCLE would like to explore means for permanently endowing inter-religious faculty as well.

CIRCLE launched in 2008 with support from a Luce grant. The mandate of that grant was to institutionalize an ethos of interfaith understanding at Hebrew College and Andover Newton, Peace said. "This new fundraising initiative to endow all 12 fellowships follows from that mandate."

Visit www.antshc-circle.org to learn more about CIRCLE.